

THE NATURE CONSPIRACY



BETRAYING U.S.
FORESTS AND
COMMUNITIES

OUR
FORESTS
AREN'T FUEL

THE TRUTH ABOUT
LOGGING AND
FOREST FIRES

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EDITORS' NOTE

Saving the Earth = Saving Forests

We need all hands on deck, right now



As documented in reports like *The Great American Stand: U.S. Forests and the Climate Emergency*, “We cannot solve the climate crisis without a major scale-up in forest protection and restoration across the planet.” Since we in the United States are blessed with more forested acres than all but three other countries on the planet, we have a special responsibility to preserve, protect and defend our forests.

From a climate perspective, industrial-scale logging is forest enemy number one. U.S. logging releases about 723 million tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year. It also slashes forests’ unique ability to absorb carbon and store it for centuries.

Logging is also damaging plant and animal habitat at a time when extinction rates are estimated to be about 100 times normal. And at a moment when racial equity is finally being recognized as essential to climate solutions, logging is robbing low-income

communities of color of flood protection, clean air, and other benefits.

For years, community-based organizations working to protect their local forests have found themselves regularly outmaneuvered by an opponent that will surprise many Americans: The Nature Conservancy. TNC is America’s biggest, richest and most influential environmental organization, with an annual budget of \$1 billion. While its mission is to “preserve the land and water on which all life depends,” TNC has been working with the logging and wood products industries and lobbying governments at all levels to increase logging and expand markets for wood products, often calling these efforts “natural climate solutions.” In doing so, TNC has given cover to logging’s supporters, making it easier for policymakers to ignore logging’s damaging effects on the climate.

In 2020, we joined environmental and justice groups and scientists from across the nation in an effort to engage The Nature Conservancy in conversation about this ongoing

forest crisis (see p. 12). TNC listened at first, but then declined to act. Given TNC’s cozy relationships with funders, policymakers, and the U.S. Forest Service, it’s tempting to chalk it all up to differences in strategy.

But the time for discretion is over. As reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change detail an increasingly dire need for bold and transformative action, emissions from industrial logging are not even being counted, let alone addressed.

It gives us no pleasure to call out a fellow environmental organization, but in our open letter to TNC (see p. 28) signed by over 150 faith, justice, and environmental groups representing 3.5 million members, we make the stakes clear. The future of our planet is on the line. We hope you will join us in urging The Nature Conservancy to embrace science and re-deploy its abundant resources and influence to protect our forests, our communities, and our Earth.

**REV. LEO
WOODBERRY**

New Alpha Community
Development Corporation

**DANNA
SMITH**

Dogwood Alliance

4

THE NATURE CONSPIRACY

BETRAYING U.S. FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

Forests are a natural solution to the crises of climate change, environmental injustice, and species extinction. So why is the United States' biggest conservation organization helping to cut them down?

A large and growing movement made up of top climate and forest scientists, environmental justice organizations and other green groups is calling out America's biggest and richest conservation organization — The Nature Conservancy — for promoting more logging and wood production as a climate solution. They see TNC working shoulder to shoulder with some of the worst actors in the forestry industry to advance an agenda that is damaging forests, the climate, biodiversity, and environmental justice communities.

HERE'S WHY PROTECTING FORESTS MATTERS:

As the climate crisis intensifies, forests remain our most effective system for removing and accumulating massive amounts of climate-changing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and providing essential protections against extreme weather events like flooding and droughts.

Low-wealth and communities of color are already disproportionately suffering from the impacts of climate change, forest destruction, and pollution, losing their health, homes and loved ones.

And at a time when extinction rates are estimated at 100 times normal background levels, forest ecosystems provide homes for 8 out of 10 known terrestrial species of plants and animals.

Preserving intact and recovering forest ecosystems is urgent, because any delay in taking bold action to slow climate change and adapt to its impacts "will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all," according to some of the [latest findings](#) from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

"The IPCC's findings confirm the growing body of scientific evidence that it is essential to maintain the ecological integrity of our forests and all natural systems to protect and restore biodiversity and avoid the worst consequences of climate change," said William Moomaw, Ph.D., emeritus professor of international environmental policy at Tufts University, and a lead author of five IPCC reports. "As a scientist, I call on The Nature Conservancy to stop undermining these climate and biodiversity goals."



LOGGING: A MAJOR THREAT

When trees are cut down — for lumber, paper, fuel, or any other purpose — most of the carbon they store is immediately released into the atmosphere. Every year, U.S. logging releases about 723 million tons of carbon dioxide — equivalent to burning more than 3.7 billion pounds of coal. That's up to 10 times the forest emissions caused by wildfire and insect damage.

Logging also slashes — by over one-third — U.S. forests' unique ability to suck massive amounts of carbon from the atmosphere and store it. That's a critical hit to our ability to employ the full power of forests in the race against climate change, and it's more than five times the carbon-sink capacity losses caused by fires, insects, drought, wind, and land-use conversion combined.

Logging is also the biggest cause of forest cover loss in the U.S. (see figure 1). It's tempting to think of this as no big deal, since trees can eventually grow back. But in study after study, scientists keep finding that logging a forest causes long-term damage to carbon sinks (see figure 2) and to habitat for plants and animals, including endangered species.

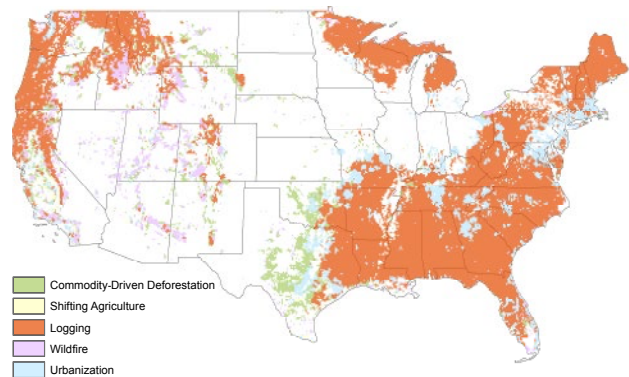
Logging also damages life-supporting services local communities depend on, including services like natural flood control and water purification, and factories that mill wood pellets and other wood products release pollution that is hazardous to human health. This disproportionately affects low-wealth communities and communities of color.

"Forests and communities of color across the South are suffering at the hands of the wood products industry," said the Rev. Michael Malcom, executive director of the People's Justice Council in Birmingham, Alabama. "This industry is making climate change worse, tearing apart our natural flood control at a time when mega storms have become the norm, and making it harder for people to breathe. By promoting the expansion of wood products in concert with the forestry industry, The Nature Conservancy is blatantly ignoring the voices of environmental justice communities."

Biodiversity is a major concern as well — especially in the South, home to the most biologically diverse forests in the country, where regulation is lacking and protected areas are few.

"The South is a diversity hotspot. It has an extraordinary number of plants and animals, of trees and flowers, am-

Figure 1
Cause of Tree Cover Loss in the United States



phibians, and fish and reptiles that live nowhere else," said Stuart Pimm, Ph.D., Doris Duke Professor of Conservation at Duke University. "Logging for wood production has degraded large areas of forests across the U.S. South, putting countless species at risk. We should protect our forests, not just willy-nilly promote more logging that will only do more damage."

AN UNEXPECTED LOGGING FAN

The U.S. is already the world's biggest maker of wood products. And from expanding industrial logging in taxpayer-owned public forests, to ramping up production of wood pellets to be burned for fuel, government policies and funding streams continue to enable the unabated expansion of wood-product markets that drives even more logging.

If you pay attention to politics, you won't be surprised that forest defenders, scientists and environmental justice communities find themselves battling corporations that depend on a steady stream of cut trees for profits, and that logging and wood-product corporations cultivate



allies in Washington and in state capitals. But you might be surprised that the nation's biggest conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy, can often be found working side by side with corporations to advocate for policies that support the expansion of wood production and logging.

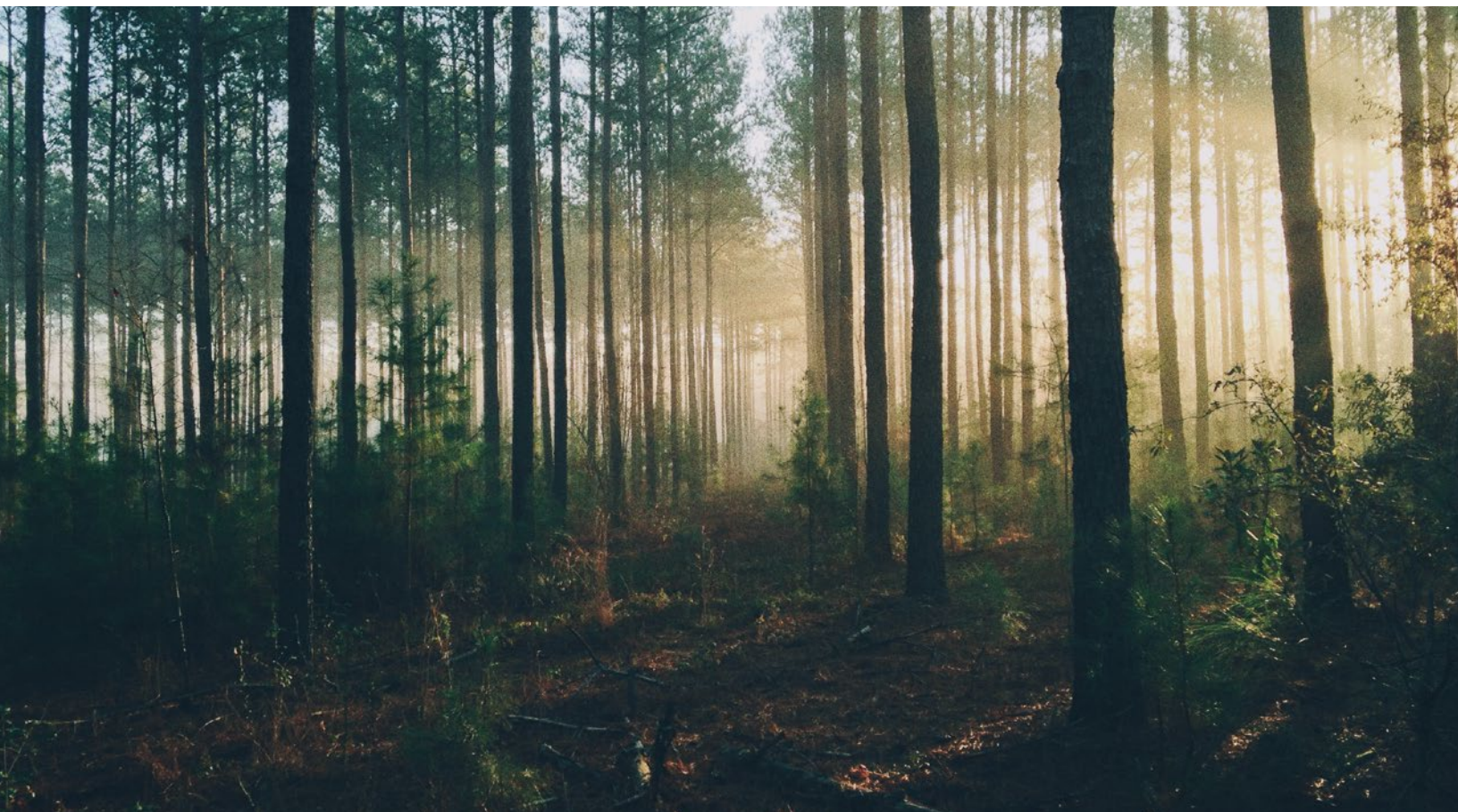
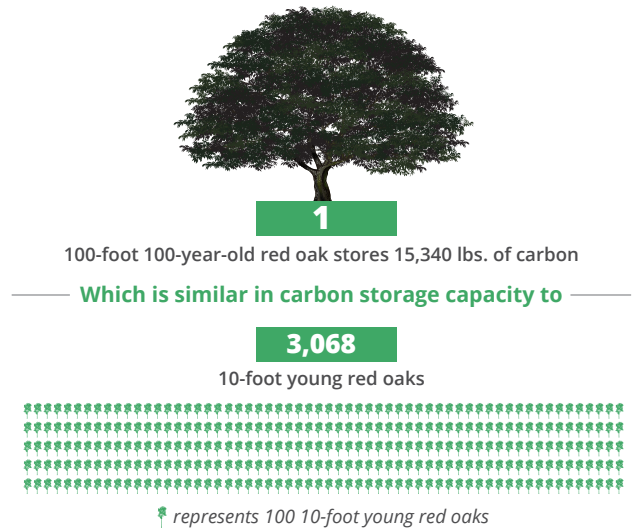
"The Nature Conservancy is ignoring science documenting the serious impacts logging is having on climate change, biodiversity and communities," said Chad Hanson, Ph.D., co-founder of the John Muir Project. "At this point, it's no longer functioning like an environmental group. It's acting like an arm of the wood-products industry."

LOGROLLING

Consider the 2021 \$1 trillion infrastructure bill. The massive legislation went far beyond roads and bridges, and industry after industry lobbied for a piece of the action.

Figure 2

The Forests' Biggest Trees Store the Most Carbon



The Nature Conservancy spent over [\\$2.6 million](#) on lobbying in 2021 — much more than any other environmental group.

As a member of the Forest Climate Working Group — along with wood-pellet giants Enviva and Drax; the nation's top lumber producer, Weyerhaeuser; and other logging-related corporations and trade associations — The Nature Conservancy signed [onto a platform](#) urging Congress to “stimulate increased use of forest products,” that is, encourage chopping down more trees. The platform acknowledges the importance of forests as a climate solution, but is peppered with asks that would actually promote more logging, including:

- » Using more wood in buildings, especially federal buildings;
- » Ramping up state efforts to promote the use of more wood products; and
- » Boosting funding for federal Wood Innovation Grants “to stimulate new product development, product improvement, new forest product uses, and new or expanded forest products markets.”

“If we are going to protect forests and communities in the U.S., we must reduce, not accelerate, the scale of logging and wood production. The Nature Conservancy is willfully ignoring this fact and the mountain of science supporting it. Instead, they are promoting policies that drive taxpayer money toward expanding industrial-scale logging and markets for wood products, while falsely claiming that it's a ‘natural climate solution,’” said Danna Smith, executive director of the Dogwood Alliance.

As the 2021 infrastructure bill began to take shape, The Nature Conservancy joined Enviva, Drax and other large wood-product manufacturers in signing onto [a statement in support](#) of the infrastructure bill's actions to leverage “forest products as a powerful, nature-based solution to help combat climate change.” TNC was also quoted in [a press release](#), alongside numerous forestry industry trade associations, supporting a bill promoting the “expanded use of forest products” — in other words, more logging — as a climate solution.

Meanwhile, some 200 climate scientists and ecologists were sending [letters](#) to Congress urging lawmakers to remove subsidies designed to expand wood production and logging from infrastructure legislation and from the reconciliation bill that was also making news.

They wrote: “...the bills contain numerous logging provisions that would dramatically increase annual carbon emissions from logging for lumber, forest biomass energy, and wood pellets on public and private forestlands nationwide, which would undermine natural climate solutions and our forests' carbon storage and sink capacities.”

When the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act finally passed in November 2021, it was chock-full of measures supported by logging interests and logging-adjacent industries, often with The Nature Conservancy's backing.

ITS PROVISIONS INCLUDE:

- » Logging an additional 30 million acres of national forests and other public lands owned by the American people
- » Exempting logging in national forests from some National Environmental Policy Act rules, and forbidding legal recourse from the public
- » \$400 million in support for expanding wood markets
- » Nearly \$2 billion for wildland fire reduction and restoration work, much of which will fund industrial logging on private and public lands and won't actually reduce the fire risk to communities ([Forests and fire, p. 20](#)).

Thanks to the infrastructure bill, taxpayers will be spending a lot of money to encourage more logging. The Nature Conservancy collaborated with industry to help get the deal done.

Just weeks after President Joe Biden signed the bill into law, [Enviva announced plans](#) to double its wood-pellet production capacity by 2027, including building eight new mills across the South and potentially expanding into California. [Drax](#) also announced plans to double its wood pellet production by 2030.

“While The Nature Conservancy is helping drive federal subsidies to expand wood markets, companies like Enviva and Drax are ramping up wood pellet production and environmental justice communities across the South are paying the price with their health,” said Kathy Egland, founder of Mississippi's Education, Economics, Environmental, Climate and Health Organization. She chairs the Environmental Justice Committee of NAACP, which recently [passed a resolution opposing the biomass](#) and wood pellet industry's expansion across the South.



"The Fund for Wild Nature assists grassroots environmental groups throughout the United States. It has been troubling to hear so many of those grassroots groups express strong concerns about the counterproductive role that The Nature Conservancy is now playing in forest and wildlands protection."

—Marnie Gaede, President | Fund for Wild Nature | California

In the West, The Nature Conservancy regularly supports logging projects in the name of fire safety — but often in places where scientists say logging won't decrease fire danger, and might actually make fire damage to communities worse. TNC also convenes working groups that are supposed to incorporate the views of local communities and environmental experts into decision-making about logging on public land. But community organizations and scientists keep finding themselves excluded from these discussions. ([Forests and fire, p. 20](#)).

"In Oregon and New Mexico, TNC has been promoting aggressive forest thinning projects in critical habitat of endangered species, roadless areas, and national

monuments in opposition to many local conservation groups and scientists. These projects not only degrade forests but result in far more carbon emissions from logging than if a fire burned through the area. This is all going on behind the scenes in California and in states across the country," said Dominick DellaSala, Ph.D., chief scientist at Wild Heritage. "It's like moles burrowing into everything at the policy level, and we have to play whack-a-mole."

Across the country, local groups and scientists have found themselves disagreeing with TNC over logging on public lands, legislation that would protect old growth, and questionable forest carbon offset projects ([see Calendar of Conservancy Controversy, p. 26](#)).

// The Nature Conservancy was originally formed by scientists committed to bringing science into conserving land and species. Today's TNC betrays those founders' goals by favoring the timber and energy industries, closing their eyes to latest science, offering every excuse to avoid 'controversy,' and persistently protecting money more than protecting nature."

—Jerry Freilich, Ph.D. | The Vocal Seniority | Oregon



Families protest Enviva's wood pellets plant in Hamlet, N.C., which can produce 600,000 metric tons of biomass-fuel each year.

KEEP THE TREES — AND THE CARBON — IN THE FOREST

The older and less disturbed a forest is, the more carbon it accumulates, the better it functions for natural flood control and protecting water quality, and the more species it supports. But only about one-third of the world's forests have escaped human disturbances such as logging or clearing for agriculture. Forests that remain largely free from modern-day human disturbance store up to 70 times the amount of carbon as logged and replanted forests.

This is especially relevant in the contiguous United States, where only about 5% of forests are considered to be old growth. The ecological integrity of most forests across the country has been significantly compromised. It's heartening that some Northeastern and Appalachian forests are coming back from being logged decades or centuries ago, and are naturally evolving into a mature state. But in other places, especially the Southeast and parts of the Northwest, forests remain in a degraded, fragmented and cut-over state.

Given the twin crises of climate change and species extinction, scientists say that preserving our remaining old-growth forests won't be enough to limit climate change, slow species loss, and defend communities. We need to protect more forests — including forests that have been logged, degraded and disturbed — on a much more ambitious scale.

More and more scientists are warning that the climate impacts of commercial logging — often relabeled as “forest management” — are just as serious as the climate impacts of losing forests outright to development or agriculture. But TNC and industry repeatedly claim that expanding wood markets is climate-friendly, because it makes forests more commercially valuable and therefore less likely to be cleared and converted to other uses. This line of argument generally omits any reference to the negative impacts of logging.

“They are quick to point the finger at wildfires, climate change, insects, urbanization and everything except logging as threats,” said Susan Masino, Ph.D., Vernon Roosa Professor of Applied Science at Trinity College in Connecticut. “But there is ample evidence that logging is causing a lot of harm.”

A DIFFERENT FUTURE FOR FORESTS?

Logging is not going to screech to a complete halt. But what if we stopped looking at almost every forest as a potential timber sale, and instead focused on the long-term, intrinsic value of forests to people, ecosystems, and the climate?

Scientists Susan Masino and William Moomaw coined the term proforestation: protecting some natural forests to foster continuous growth, carbon accumulation, and structural complexity. This approach is used in wilderness areas and parts of national parks. Establishing proforestation as the default option more broadly would allow some forests to accumulate a lot more carbon compared to forests managed for timber production.

“Proforestation is the most effective, quickest, and most cost-effective thing that we can do to combat climate change and prevent extinction,” Masino said. “Yes, we need areas that provide local use of resources, but we urgently need to protect more forests for natural processes. Here in New England, your average forest that has been logged before can store two to four times the amount of carbon it does now, if only it is allowed to keep growing. Proforestation is evidence-based medicine for natural forests.”

Picture this: letting forests grow and absorb as much carbon dioxide as possible while they also provide habitat, protect communities, enable fresh air and clean water, and offer natural beauty for people to enjoy. That sounds like the kind of nature-oriented conservation strategy you'd expect The Nature Conservancy to embrace.

“The Nature Conservancy has done some significant work protecting special places over the years, but its reputation as an arm of the forest products industry is now overshadowing its image as a protector of nature,” said Smith of the Dogwood Alliance. “The Nature Conservancy has so much power and influence. They're supposed to be protecting nature, not destroying it. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment. We really need The Nature Conservancy to get on the right side of history before it's too late.”

DISREGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES

In 2020, an alliance of scientists, environmental groups and justice organizations set out to engage The Nature Conservancy about these concerns. They understood that TNC brings in more money in a week than just about all environmental justice groups raise in a year, and has influence across the country and in Washington, D.C. They hoped to convince TNC to stop using its abundant resources and influence to promote logging and the expanded use of wood products.

In 2020, about 50 organizations signed a letter to TNC's CEO, Jennifer Morris, asking for a meeting to discuss concerns that TNC was "prioritizing the financial interests of the industrial logging and wood products industry at the expense of solving the climate crisis, protecting nature and advancing environmental justice." The moment seemed right: Public interest in both racial justice and climate change was running high.

Two meetings with TNC's CEO and senior staff followed, including a five-hour meeting with scientists, environmental justice and forest protection groups. The alliance offered to work with The Nature Conservancy on a joint statement acknowledging the impacts of wood production on climate, biodiversity, and environmental justice communities, and the importance of protecting forests from industrial-scale logging as a top-tier climate priority.

Six weeks later, TNC's Morris replied that The Nature Conservancy would not be issuing any such public statement.

She thanked the coalition for the dialogue, and made no offer of further discussion.

"We've never had a company or a nonprofit just basically say, 'We don't want to talk to you anymore.' In most cases, something comes out of it. People will set up stakeholder groups that meet regularly, or they'll set up an environmental justice subcommittee," said the Rev. Leo Woodberry of New Alpha Community Development Corporation in Florence, South Carolina. He has a long history of building coalitions that work successfully with nonprofits, corporations and governments.

Now over 150 faith, justice, and environmental groups, representing 3.5 million members, have rallied to the cause of getting The Nature Conservancy to stop supporting logging and commit to forest protection. They have signed onto a new letter asking TNC to change its approach to forests and embrace environmental justice ([see p. 28](#)). They are making the letter public in hopes that The Nature Conservancy will recognize that its reputation is at stake.

"We are used to the forestry industry ignoring science, deflecting community concerns and claiming they are good for climate, biodiversity and communities. But it's unconscionable that a group like The Nature Conservancy is behaving in the same way," said Rev. Woodberry. "It takes all of us working together to take good care of the planet and each other."



A photograph of a forest scene. A large, textured tree trunk is in the foreground on the left. To its right, there are several green ferns and other foliage. The background is filled with more trees and branches, creating a dense forest atmosphere. The lighting is soft, suggesting a dappled sunlight effect.

14

SOUTHERN
COMMUNITIES
SUFFER AS FORESTS
FALL FOR FUEL

It is a scene repeated across the South: A corporation builds a wood-pellet plant in a small town where people don't have a lot of money and most of the residents are Black. The plant turns trees into tiny pellets that are shipped to Europe and Asia to be burned to generate electricity. The wood pellet company claims to be environmentally friendly. But the neighbors see things differently.

"People are prisoners in their own homes. Not being able to come out and work in their gardens without

having runny noses, having to put tents up to cook out because of the dust and particulates coming from the mill. Noise 24/7 from trucks and the debarker. People having to spray their cars down every two or three days and power-wash their homes every three months," said Belinda Joyner of the Concerned Citizens of Northampton County in North Carolina, where the world's largest wood-pellet manufacturer, Enviva, built a plant in 2013.

"We are one of the poorest counties in the state; about 21% of the county

lives below the poverty level," Joyner said. "Our property taxes went up to 6% because of the incentives our local government gave to Enviva for setting up a wood-pellet plant here."

▼ POLLUTING PLANTS

Drax's wood pellet plant in Gloster, Miss., overlooks the Blackmon Hole community. It was fined \$2.5 million for breaking air-pollution rules.



Enviva has 10 plants in six Southern states, and plans to double production over the next five years. Another wood-pellet giant, Drax, is also planning to build more wood — pellet mills, like the one that looms over Blackmon Hole, a Black-owned trailer park in Gloster, Mississippi.

This is a rural community, a majority Black community, whose average household income is no more than \$17,000. They don't get any of the benefits, but they get all of the burden from this industrial pollution," says the Rev. Michael Malcom, executive director of the People's Justice Council in Birmingham, Alabama.

For example, residents of Blackmon Hole have been reporting health issues, including trouble breathing, since the pellet plant started up operations. In 2020, Drax agreed to pay a record \$2.5 million fine to the state

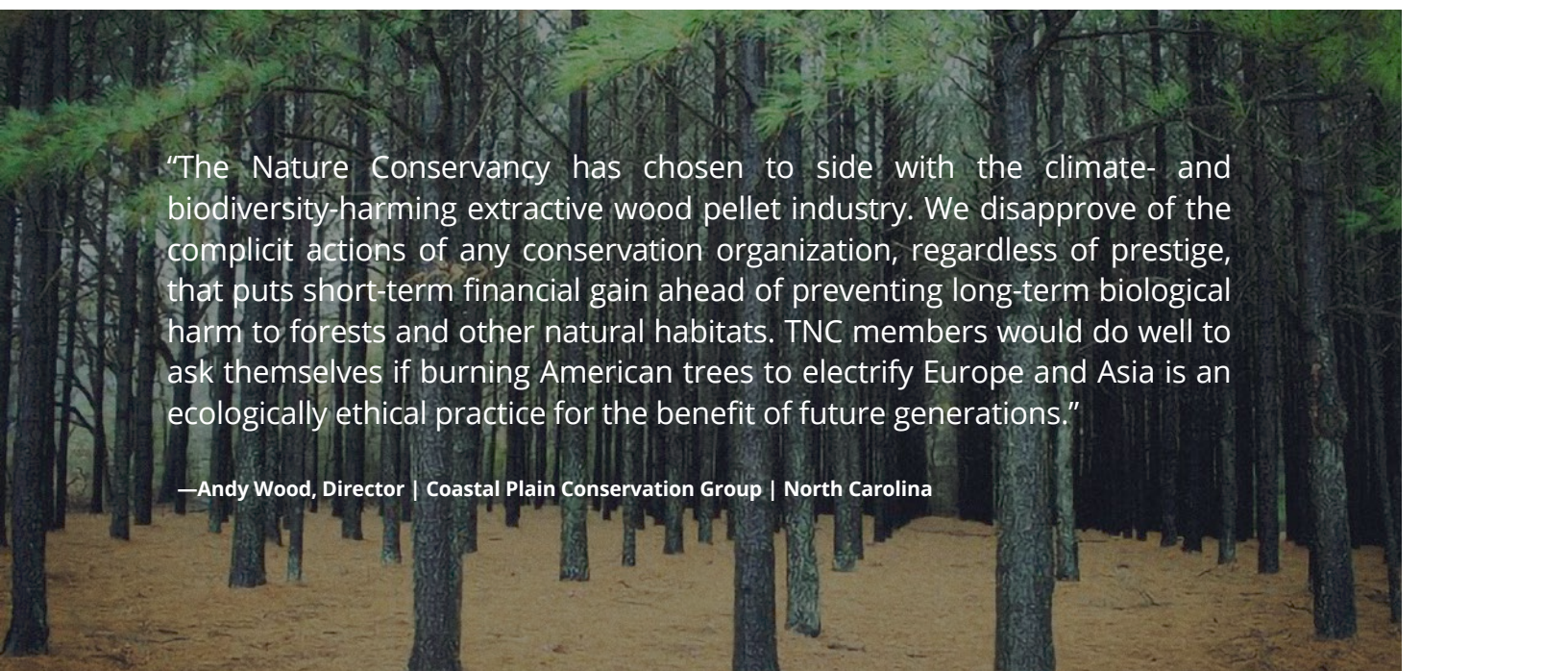
Department of Environmental Quality for volatile organic compound (VOC) pollution levels that were three times higher than permitted. VOCs can contribute to health problems including respiratory issues, watery eyes, and damage to the central nervous system.

Drax and Enviva both plan to double their wood pellet production by the end of the decade. Environmental justice groups say the wood pellet industry is benefiting from a halo effect as the nation's biggest conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), works in alignment with wood pellet companies to advance policies favorable to the wood products industry. For example, The Nature Conservancy has joined Drax, Enviva, and other industrial forestry companies as a member of the Forest Climate Working Group, which says its members "have found common

▼ WOOD PELLET PLANTS

The Enviva wood-pellet plant in Northampton County, N.C., is permitted to produce 750,000 metric tons of wood pellets per year.





"The Nature Conservancy has chosen to side with the climate- and biodiversity-harming extractive wood pellet industry. We disapprove of the complicit actions of any conservation organization, regardless of prestige, that puts short-term financial gain ahead of preventing long-term biological harm to forests and other natural habitats. TNC members would do well to ask themselves if burning American trees to electrify Europe and Asia is an ecologically ethical practice for the benefit of future generations."

—Andy Wood, Director | Coastal Plain Conservation Group | North Carolina

ground on forest-related solutions to climate change" and represent a "unified voice across the forestry sector."

"TNC is not engaging with the communities like mine that are impacted by the wood pellet industry and has done nothing to help us stop the harm being done," said Erniko Brown, Director of Organizing & Partnership Engagement at the Dogwood Alliance, who lives near an Enviva wood pellet mill. "Instead, they've teamed up against us with the very companies causing our communities' suffering in pushing wood markets as a climate solution. What about our communities?"

"Just because it's called The Nature Conservancy doesn't mean that it doesn't do bad things," added Rev. Malcom. "It's hypocritical to side with polluters while putting out messages that you're siding with the planet and

the people. And it's extremely hypocritical to put out a statement that 'environmentalists cannot be silent in matters of racism' while standing by polluting industries that perpetuate environmental racism."

Wood pellet companies often talk about making pellets from leftover wood that would just decay anyway, such as treetops and branches left over from timber harvests. But activists have traced entire trees as they are cut, loaded onto logging trucks, and delivered to wood pellet mills.

Wood pellet companies and many governments also claim that chopping down trees in the South, milling them into pellets and shipping them to Asia and Europe to be burned for electricity is somehow carbon neutral, despite abundant evidence to the contrary. After all, they argue, the trees will probably grow back.

▲ FAKE FORESTS

Native forests across the South have been logged and turned into monoculture pine plantations.

"They leave out the fact that trees don't grow back instantly," said William Moomaw, emeritus professor of international environmental policy at Tufts University. "If you cut 50-year-old trees and all goes well, then in 50 years that patch of forest might grow back and you might end up with the same amount of carbon stored as when you started — but it will still be much less than the same forest could have stored if it hadn't been logged in the first place. And in the meantime, you have less carbon stored in the forest and more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, where it contributes to climate change. Eventual climate neutrality is not the same as real-time carbon neutrality — and



we don't have 50 years to wait for the carbon accounting to zero out."

In the meantime, logging continues in forests that had been contributing to flood protection and clean air and water, and that might otherwise have provided opportunities for expanding outdoor recreation, which actually contributes more to the South's economy than the wood products industry does.

"The wood products industry considers the Southeast to be the wood basket of the world. You just reach into the basket and pull out as much wood as you need to make a profit," said the Rev. Leo Woodberry of New Alpha Community Development Cor-

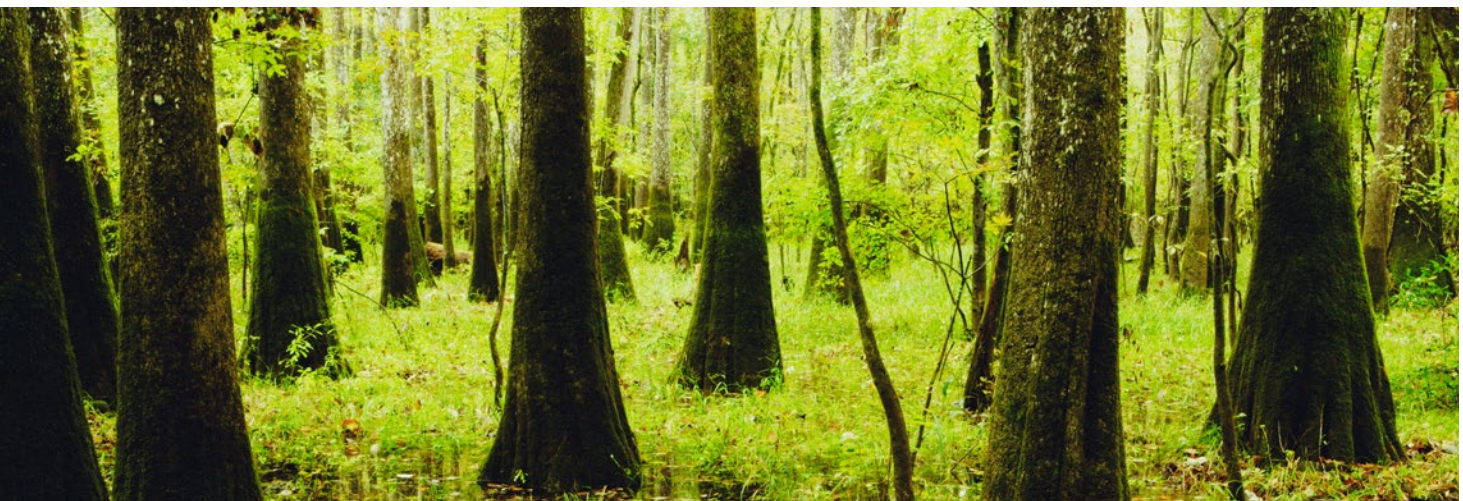
poration in Florence, South Carolina. "But they don't see the communities. They don't see the wetlands. They don't see this beautiful land occupied by such a diversity of nature. To them, it's just a basket."


Woodberry points to Brittons Neck, South Carolina: a community in the Pee Dee River watershed where Black people have lived since the 1700s. As logging has weakened natural flood controls and climate change has intensified tropical storms and extreme rain events, Brittons Neck has endured repeated flooding.

Like so many under-resourced communities on the front lines of the climate crisis, local people in this

watershed, including the Pee Dee Indian Tribe and the people of Brittons Neck, are working hard to protect forests and create new engines of rural economic development that don't involve wood products and logging. Meanwhile, TNC, with its \$1 billion-a-year budget, is promoting the expansion of wood markets.

"All faiths have narratives where, at the beginning of creation, the creator instructs human beings to be guardians of creation," said Woodberry. "Our job is to be stewards of the Earth and everything that's in it, and we've done a horrible job. We have to care for the Earth, especially now when both science and everyday observation tell us that we're in trouble."



A blue-tinted photograph of a mountain range with evergreen trees in the foreground. The mountains are layered, creating a sense of depth. The trees in the foreground are dark and silhouetted against the lighter blue background of the mountains.

“The climate crisis is here, and we are running out of time to make the changes we need to prevent the worst of it. Instead of using its billion-dollar enterprise to advance ambitious action, The Nature Conservancy’s ‘natural climate solutions’ program is tantamount to greenwashing. Frontline communities need powerful organizations like TNC to be allies in the fight, not accomplices of polluters.”

—Michael Hansen, Executive Director | GASP (Greater-Birmingham Alliance to Stop Pollution) | Alabama



20 FORESTS **AND FIRE**

Does logging forests to keep
them from burning really work?



For a long time, common wisdom held that a century of fighting fires in the American West has left forests dangerously overgrown, and therefore more likely to catch fire and burn out of control in ways that threaten communities. This notion has been used for years by logging interests to justify widespread commercial logging of our forests.

But research by a growing number of scientists is revealing that the common wisdom is wrong.

The [largest study](#) comparing fire in protected forests to fire in forests where logging is permitted looked

at 1,500 fires that burned 23 million acres over 30 years. If relatively overgrown forests really are bigger fire risks, you'd expect more intense fires in protected areas, where logging, road-building, and other activities that remove trees are either rare or prohibited.

But the researchers found that forests least likely to have been thinned out do not turn into tinderboxes for more severe fires; in fact, the opposite is true. They concluded that "forests with the highest levels of protection from logging tend to burn least severely." And as 200 scientists wrote in a [2020 letter](#) to Congress, "Reduced forest protection and in-

creased logging tend to make wild-land fires burn more intensely."

Logging removes the shady tree canopy, letting in more sunlight that dries out the forest landscape. It also removes natural windbreaks. In contrast, older forests that haven't been logged provide more shade and moisture and block much of the wind, creating a microclimate that's less conducive to fire.

But the message that logging can make forest fires harder to fight does not seem to be reaching Washington. The big 2021 infrastructure bill appropriates [over \\$3 billion](#) to programs related to wildfire.



While some elements make sense — like improving federal firefighter pay and conditions, and setting up reverse-911 systems in vulnerable communities — other elements play right into the myth that we can “manage” forests — i.e. cut down trees — in ways that will reduce the risk of fire. So, for example, there’s nearly \$2 billion for logging activities, including logging under the euphemism of “thinning.”

“All logging companies have to do to get some of that money is to say the magic words ‘fuel reduction,’ and they can cut down the most fire-resistant large, old trees; they can clear-cut mature forests; or they can call it ‘commercial thinning’ and kill 80% of the trees in a forest,” said Chad Hanson, Ph.D., of the John Muir Project. “People hear about ‘thinning’ projects and they think it’s

rakes and pruning shears, when it’s actually chainsaws and bulldozers. It’s commercial logging for profit, just with a different label.”

In its quest to expand its logging footprint, the forest and forestry products industry has found an ally in the nation’s biggest conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy. For example, as the 2021 infrastructure bill was being debated, TNC joined logging companies and wood-products companies in advocating expanding logging and the use of wood products ([see p. 8](#)).

“The Nature Conservancy stands to make enormous amounts of money from the infrastructure bill, not just from selling the trees from lands they own to the lumber mills, but they also get tax subsidies because they are a

RESTORING ► FORESTS?

Hogback Project, Cherokee National Forest, Tennessee: Healthy second-growth hardwood stands were logged and burned to “restore” a “fire-associated forest type.” The result: profound erosion requiring tens of thousands of dollars in mitigation.





"The Nature Conservancy has been a powerful promoter of "restoration logging" on national forests for decades. This logging has been very controversial, with many forests suffering not only failures in these supposed restoration projects, but in some cases having extensive ecological damage. With years of these projects accumulating, it is time for TNC to give a clear look at the effects of this policy on the land."

—Davis Mounger | Tennessee Heartwood

non-profit corporation," Hanson said. The Nature Conservancy also promotes and [participates in collaboratives](#) that advise the U.S. Forest Service on logging on public lands. Gathering interested parties to guide government action sounds like a good, democratic idea. But scientists and activists say anyone who doesn't advocate increasing logging as a forest-health and fire-protection measure is routinely frozen out.

"These are carefully controlled, membership-only collaboratives, and they only allow people in them who will agree with logging the forest. If you're not on that side, you're excluded and rolled over," said Dominick DellaSala, Ph.D., chief scientist at Wild Heritage.

"It all comes down to how you see forests. If you see them as an excuse to use fire to get logs out, then you are going to cut down the biggest, most fire-resistant trees to pay for

small tree and shrub removal, and it will look very little like a forest after it's done," said DellaSala.

"The Nature Conservancy is fundamentally out of step with climate change science, since the logging that they propose over vast areas puts much more carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to worsening fires, and killing more trees than naturally occurring fires themselves would. It's a vicious cycle of cause — logging and carbon emissions — and effect: more wildfires."

In Western forests, many tree species have evolved to withstand fire, and even to depend on it for seed dispersal; and countless wildlife species depend on post-fire habitat. Of course, fire in the middle of a vast forest is different from fire in and around communities where people live. Especially after recent devastating fire seasons, many researchers

want to see firefighting and fire prevention resources redirected toward protecting communities, and away from logging or "thinning" swaths of distant national forest, which research shows won't actually protect a town from fire. There are practical preventive steps to take, but they happen much closer to home.

When buildings burn in wildfires, ignition is almost always caused by embers blown far ahead of the main body of the fire. So homeowners should keep roofs and gutters clear of dry leaves and pine needles, and install ember-proof mesh in any vents that lead from outside to inside a home. They should keep 100 feet of defensible space around their homes, kept clear of fallen leaves, twigs, dead grass, and other flammable material; keep trees pruned; and keep 100 feet of garden hose at the ready. This is what's been shown to work.

"Before the 2017 La Tuna Fire in the mountains of Southern California, the community had been very serious about implementing these community-based fire-prevention measures, and only five of 1,400 buildings burned," Hanson said. "On the other hand, we've seen devastating California fires destroy towns like Paradise, Greenville, and Grizzly Flats after 'fuel reduction' logging had been done in area forests. Residents were told this could help keep their towns safe. But the fires often burned faster and more intensely through the logged areas than the areas left unlogged. 'Fuel reduction' didn't protect people's homes," Hanson said.

In the West, most forests are owned by the American people, in the form of national forests and other public lands. There's a long history of controversy over selling taxpayer-owned timber to private companies for profit, with the logging industry and the U.S. Forest Service advocating logging, and environmental and community groups advocating forest protection.

Mature forests absorb and store enormous amounts of carbon dioxide and provide critical habitat for plants and animals. They help clean the water and the air, protect communities from flooding and other extreme weather events, and provide places for people to enjoy nature. When a forest is logged, it's diminished, and planting saplings in the name of restoration doesn't make up for the damage.

"We have to choose," said William Moomaw, Ph.D., emeritus professor at Tufts University, and a co-author of five Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports. "If climate change is the existential threat we know it to be, how much of our forests should be set aside for slowing and eventually reducing CO2 in the atmosphere, and how much of our forests should be for lumber companies?"



Fires create vibrant forests. Fire is a natural component of forest ecosystems in the Western U.S. Post-fire forest habitat hosts diverse and abundant wildlife and plant species.



CALENDAR CONSERVATION CONTROVERSY

This isn't the first time The Nature Conservancy has had its odds with environmental groups. Here are some examples of TNC controversies.

2005

The Senate Finance Committee releases [report](#) after two-year review of The Nature Conservancy's transactions and activities; TNC changes some practices.

2014

Prominent conservation biologists [confront The Nature Conservancy's](#) leadership about their Chief Scientist undermining efforts to protect biodiversity. Chief Scientist departs TNC in 2015.

2015

TNC's CEO [resigns](#) in the wake of sexual harassment allegations.

2003

A wide-ranging [Washington Post](#) series raises questions about oil drilling, development, logging and other activities TNC permits on conservation lands; details potential financial conflicts of interest, such as lending money to executives; and prompts [Senate](#) and [IRS](#) investigations.

2014

Naomi Klein's book [This Changes Everything](#) details TNC making [millions of dollars from oil drilling](#) on its Texas City Prairie Reserve, established to protect biodiversity.

2014

Federal district court in Montana orders The Nature Conservancy to stop logging 111,000 acres of old-growth forest bear habitat [on national forest](#).

6

DAR OF RVANCY OVERSY

ature Conservancy has been at
s, scientists, and others. Here are
es over the past two decades.

9

and president both resign
e of a workplace misconduct
l harassment [investigation](#).

2019

Local environmental activists [accuse](#)
[TNC of creating bogus analysis](#) to
support Forest Service tree-cutting
goals in the Intermountain West.

2020

Bloomberg Green reports that The
Nature Conservancy sold [carbon](#)
[offsets that didn't really offset any](#)
[carbon](#), accepting money from
corporations to protect forest land
that had already been protected.

ontana
vancy to
of grizzly
[forest lands](#).

2019

Chris Ketcham's book [This Land](#)
discloses how TNC's work with the
timber industry in the Collaborative
Forest Landscape Restoration
Program facilitated destructive
logging practices on public lands.

2020

Scientists at Western forest protection
organizations release four [case studies](#)
calling TNC's fire science and 'members-
only' collaboratives into question.

OPEN LETTER TO THE NATURE CONSERVANCY: STOP PERPETUATING FOREST
DESTRUCTION, POLLUTION, CARBON EMISSIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

April 5, 2022

The Nature Conservancy
Jennifer Morris
Chief Executive Officer

Dear Ms. Morris,

The undersigned 158 organizations with over 3.5 million members working to protect forests as a critical climate justice solution, are writing to express our deep concerns with The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) pattern of promoting policies that favor the financial interests of the industrial logging and wood products industry at the expense of solving the climate crisis, protecting nature and advancing environmental justice. Our concerns, outlined in more detail below, were brought to your attention in a similar letter signed by 50 organizations on June 25, 2020. These concerns also parallel those expressed in two separate open letters sent to Congress in 2021 signed by over 200 climate scientists across the country.¹

Your failure to address these concerns over the past year has left us no choice but to make our concerns public. We cannot remain silent while the world's largest conservation organization continues to ignore science and the concerns of environmental justice communities. In sum, TNC programs are promoting false climate solutions that center the financial interests of large lumber, pulp/paper, biomass/wood-pellet and other corporations that perpetuate carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, pollution and environmental injustice.

As an organization whose mission and brand is focused on protecting nature we find TNC's "natural climate solutions" program quite troubling. TNC consistently promotes wood products, biomass energy, ineffective carbon offsets and logging as climate, fire management and forest restoration solutions. This is providing green cover for countless corporations that are responsible for climate change, pollution and the destruction of nature, all of which disproportionately affect low income and communities of color. In various public policy arenas across the country, TNC is promoting wood markets and/or logging in direct conflict with environmental justice communities and scientific evidence regarding the impacts on climate, biodiversity, fire risk and human health. There is a recurrent pattern in which TNC omits the scientific research that reveals problems with the sort of logging projects that TNC is endorsing, and at the same time TNC overlooks or excludes concerns raised by those local groups that are most actively challenging the harms from this logging.

For example, a recent scientific analysis documents that logging is the single largest driver of carbon emissions from US forests, six times greater than from fires, land-use change, insects, drought, and wind damage combined.² TNC consistently omits this fact in relevant communications and has refused to publicly acknowledge it. Equally concerning, TNC has refused to publicly acknowledge the well-documented disproportionate health impacts associated with the pollution emitted from the manufacturing of wood pellets and other wood products on environmental justice communities. Given TNC's power and influence as a \$1 billion/year nonprofit, your organization is effectively using large charitable contributions that should be spent on protecting nature to assist the forestry industry in blocking, ignoring and deflecting hard evidence and voices of concern detrimental to industry interests in a manner that is preventing vital progress on the climate, environmental justice and biodiversity crises we face.

OPEN LETTER TO THE NATURE CONSERVANCY: STOP PERPETUATING FOREST DESTRUCTION, POLLUTION, CARBON EMISSIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

April 5, 2022

At a time when we must be diligent and aggressive in our efforts to address the health impacts on communities of color overburdened with pollution, protect biodiversity and keep as much carbon -- including from fossil fuels and logging -- out of the atmosphere as possible, promoting wood products, forest biomass energy, logging and ineffective carbon markets is dangerous and irresponsible. Yet, TNC remains engaged in a partnership with Bain & Company that promotes an increase in wood consumption and the establishment of commercial tree plantations as climate solutions.³ As discussed above, hundreds of climate scientists and ecologists have concluded that we must reduce wood consumption to draw down atmospheric carbon and mitigate the climate crisis, and any increase in wood consumption equates to an increase in carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

There is ample evidence that corporations such as Drax and Enviva -- two of the largest corporate players in the biomass and wood pellet markets -- are harming forests and environmental justice communities across the South. Some 800 scientists globally have publicly expressed concerns that the production and burning of wood pellets to produce electricity will accelerate climate change and biodiversity loss.⁴ TNC has refused to join scientists, climate and forest protection organizations, and environmental justice communities in publicly opposing biomass as a false climate solution. Instead, TNC chooses to align with the Forest Climate Working Group (FCWG) which includes Enviva and Drax. According to the FCWG website its members “have found common ground on forest-related solutions to climate change.”⁵ TNC’s participation in this group amounts to a public endorsement of biomass.

Finally, for its own financial benefit, TNC continues to promote forest carbon markets that allow fossil fuel polluters to offset their emissions with sham forest conservation efforts when the science is clear that a rapid phase out of fossil fuels is necessary to protect human health and avoid climate chaos. There is also ample evidence that forest carbon offsets allow corporations to continue to pollute while failing to deliver actual carbon emission reductions. We are dismayed with the extent to which TNC is focused on promoting false solutions that work for corporations and large landowners at the expense of a safe climate, vibrant natural systems and healthy communities.

We urge you to take immediate steps to align TNC’s programs with its vision “where the diversity of life thrives, and people act to conserve nature for its own sake” including:

1. Publicly acknowledge the climate, biodiversity and environmental justice impacts associated with industrial logging and wood production and end the promotion of logging, wood consumption and the expansion of commercial tree plantations as a climate solution.
2. Eliminate all conflicts of interest with partners, investors as well as members of TNC’s Board and Advisory Boards that have financial ties with, or who promote, large-scale extractive industries that exacerbate climate change, including specifically the Forest Climate Working Group and Bain & Company.
3. Reallocate resources and staff time to advance a massive scale up in strict protection for all primary and mature forests (including those recently burned, where fire creates ecologically vital “snag forest” habitat,⁶) as well as vast acreages of currently degraded natural forests, such as across the coastal plain of the Southern US and numerous areas in the Northeastern US.

OPEN LETTER TO THE NATURE CONSERVANCY: STOP PERPETUATING FOREST
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April 5, 2022

4. Stop promoting logging as a strategy for fuel reduction for managing wildfire and acknowledge the evidence⁷ that logging is exacerbating climate change and often fire intensity, while harming ecosystems that local organizations have identified as priority for protection.
5. Advocate for a shift in societal behavior away from wasteful consumerism of wood-based products in order to allow nature and communities to recover from logging and pollution impacts.
6. Cease support for forest carbon offsets and all forms of forest biomass energy.
7. Publicly acknowledge the disproportionate impacts of the forestry industry on environmental justice communities, including from pollution and flooding. Align all policy positions with environmental justice principles and the needs of affected environmental justice communities in relation to community health, safety and resiliency considerations, including pollution caused by wood product facilities.

As organizations whose constituents rely on us as leaders in the fight to address the climate crisis, protect biodiversity and advance environmental justice, we feel compelled to publicly confront TNC with these issues since you have thus far refused to take action to address these concerns.

We sincerely hope that given the gravity of the challenges we face that you will take these concerns more seriously and avoid further risking TNC's brand and credibility as an organization that is supposed to be focused on protecting nature, not destroying it and harming environmental justice communities in the process.

Sincerely,

350 Seattle	BENIN)	Biofuelwatch
A Community Voice - Louisiana	Anthropocene Alliance	Biomass Action Group
Adopt-A-House/American Venice Civic Association	Applegate Neighborhood Network	Black Christian Leadership Coalition
Advocates for Forest Carbon	Arm in Arm	Black Hills Clean Water Alliance
Ahora Inc.	Athens County's Future Action Network, acfan.org	Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project
Alabama Interfaith Power and Light	Bark	Botanigrafika
Alaska Rainforest Defenders	Battle Creek Alliance	California Chaparral Institute
Alliance for the Wild Rockies	Bay Area - System Change not Climate Change	Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development
Amis de l'Afrique Francophone-Bénin (AMAF-	Bellingham Environment Centre	

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April 5, 2022


Cherokee Concerned Citizens	Environment Now	Americas
Christians Caring for Creation	Environmental Protection Information Center - EPIC	IdleNo More SF Bay
Christians For The Mountains	FERN	Indigenous Environmental Network
Citizens Committee for Flood Relief	For Kids & Nature Forest Web	Institute for Policy Studies Climate Program
Clackamas County Climate Activists (CCAC)	FreshWater Accountability Project	Interfaith Climate Action Network of Contra Costa
Climate Hawks Vote	Fresnans Against Fracking	John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute
Climate Justice Alliance	Friends of Mohawk Trail State Forest	Justice First Coalition
Climate Reality Project - Charlotte	Friends of the Bitterroot	Kingdom Living Temple
Coal River Mountain Watch	Friends of the Clearwater	Klamath Forest Alliance
Coalition for Wetlands and Forests (CWF)	Friends of the Earth	Lakelands Citizens for Clean Air, Inc
Coastal Plain Conservation Group	Fund for Democratic Communities	Landelijk Netwerk Bossen-en Bomnbescherming
Colectivo VientoSur	Fund for Wild Nature	Last Tree Laws
Collective Medicine	Gallatin Wildlife Association	LEAD Agency, Inc.
Concerned Citizens of Cook County	Gallatin Yellowstone Wilderness Alliance	Los Padres ForestWatch
Concerned Citizens of Franklin County	GASP	Mason County Climate Justice
Concerned Citizens of Northampton County	Global Justice Ecology Project	Massachusetts Forest Watch
Conservation Congress	Grassroots International	Michigan Interfaith Power & Light
Dogwood Alliance	Grazing Reform Project	Movement Rights
Earth Action, Inc.	Great Old Broads for Wilderness - Central Oregon	MS Communities United for Prosperity
Eco Advocates NW	Green Root Podcast	NAACP - Mecklenburg Chapter
EcoEquity	Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice	National Coalition on Creation Care
EEECHO	Greenpeace US	Natural Resources Law
Elders Climate Action	Heartwood	NC Climate Justice Collective
Empower Our Future - Colorado	Hometown Action	NC WARN
Environment East Gippsland	Idle No More SF Bay/ Indigenous Women of the	

OPEN LETTER TO THE NATURE CONSERVANCY: STOP PERPETUATING FOREST DESTRUCTION, POLLUTION, CARBON EMISSIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

April 5, 2022

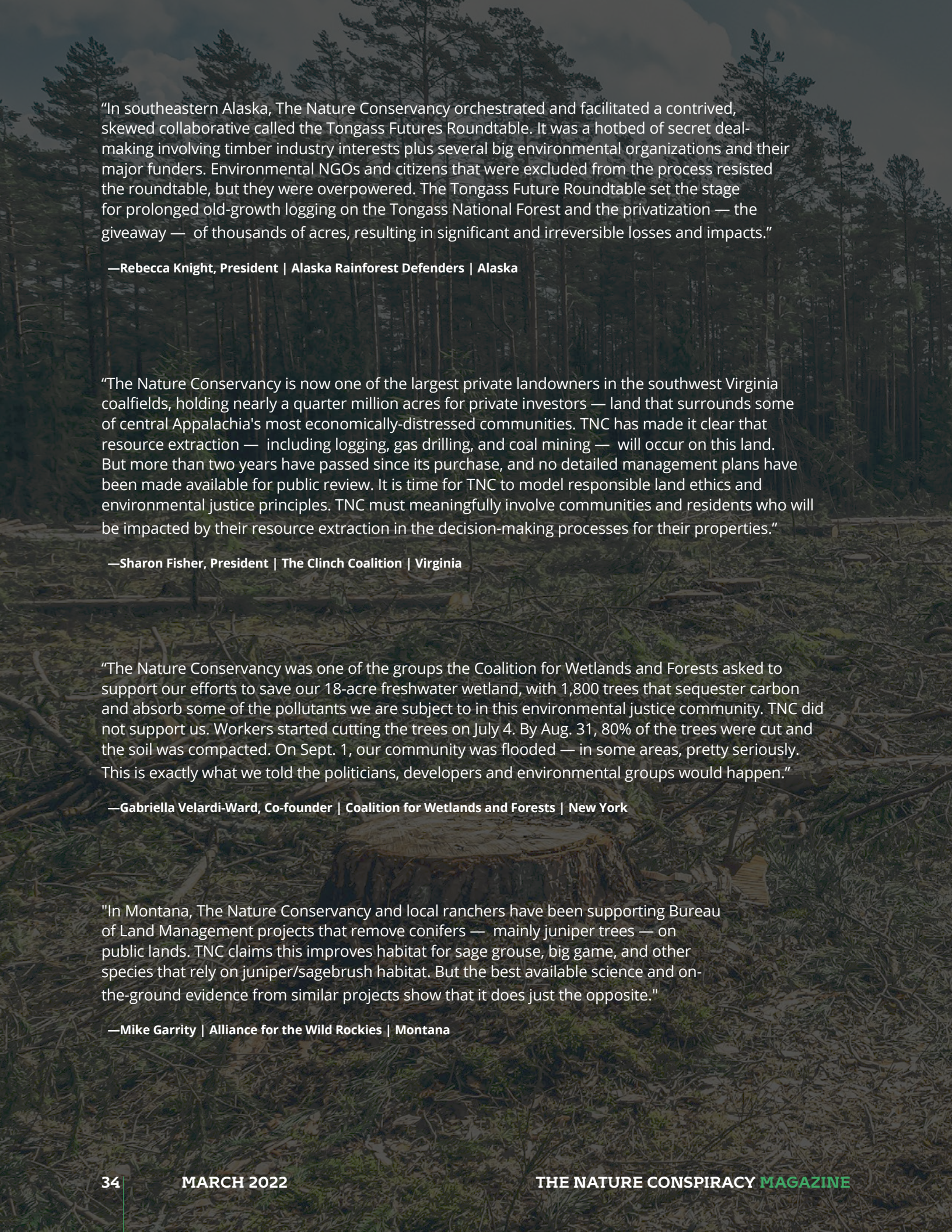
New Alpha CDC	Sacred America	UnKoch My Campus
New Jersey Forest Watch	Santa Fe Forest Coalition	VientoSur
Nicaragua Center for Community Action	Save Massachusetts Forests	Wasteful Unreasonable Use
Nuclear Information and Resource Service	Save Our Sky Blue Waters	Water Justice and Gender
Olympic Climate Action	Save our Soundside	Wendell State Forest Alliance
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility	Saving Island Green Wildlife & Beyond	West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs
Organized Uplifting Resources & Strategies	SC Environmental Justice Network	West Street Recovery/ Northeast Action Collective
Partnership for Policy Integrity	SC State University Environmental Action Club	Whitney M Slater Foundation
PeaceHost.net	Sequoia ForestKeeper®	Whole Earth Balance
Pee Dee Indian Tribe	Somos Semillas Antillanas	Wild Heritage
People for Community Recovery	Southern Forests Conservation Coalition	Wild Nature Institute
People's Justice Council	Stand.earth	Wilderness Watch
Pivot Point	Sunflower Alliance	WildLands Defense
Public Lands Media	Sunrise Movement	Windrose Fund
Rachel Carson Council	Sunrise PDX	Wiyot Natural Resources Dept.
Rainforest Action Network	Swan View Coalition	Women's Forest Sanctuary Land Trust
Red de Acción por los Derechos Ambientales	Tennessee Heartwood	Yellowstone to Uintas Connection
Renewal of Life Trust	The Clinch Coalition	
RESTORE: The North Woods	The Enviro Show	
Richwood Advisory Council	The Forest Advocate	
	The Vocal Seniority	
	U2U	Cc: TNC Board of Directors

- 1 <http://forestlegacies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Scientist-letter-to-Congress-13May20.pdf>
https://johnmuirproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ScientistLetterOpposingLoggingProvisionsInBBB_BIF4Nov21.pdf
- 2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5108824/>
- 3 <https://socialimpactatbain.com/environment/environment-spotlight.html>
- 4 <https://empowerplants.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/scientist-letter-on-eu-forest-biomass-796-signatories-as-of-january-16-2018.pdf>
- 5 <https://forestclimateworkinggroup.org/about/>
- 6 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780128027493/the-ecological-importance-of-mixed-severity-fires>
- 7 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320722000520>

The background of the page is a composite of four aerial photographs. The left half shows a dense green forest with a light-colored dirt path or clearing running vertically through the center. The right half shows a forest floor covered in brown pine needles and branches, with several logs and stumps scattered across it. A dark road with white dashed lines runs vertically down the center, separating the two halves.

"The Nature Conservancy supposedly represented conservationists on the Montana Forest Action Advisory Council (MFAAC). No local conservation groups, with their knowledge of individual areas, were invited to participate. Without considering recent fire activity, MFAAC declared our area to be at high risk for fire. Its first recommendation was a large timber sale, which Missoula County commissioners oppose. TNC does not represent conservation or local communities. They consistently advocate for commercial logging, undercutting the efforts of local conservationists."

—Jim Miller | Friends of the Bitterroot | Montana



"In southeastern Alaska, The Nature Conservancy orchestrated and facilitated a contrived, skewed collaborative called the Tongass Futures Roundtable. It was a hotbed of secret deal-making involving timber industry interests plus several big environmental organizations and their major funders. Environmental NGOs and citizens that were excluded from the process resisted the roundtable, but they were overpowered. The Tongass Future Roundtable set the stage for prolonged old-growth logging on the Tongass National Forest and the privatization — the giveaway — of thousands of acres, resulting in significant and irreversible losses and impacts."

—Rebecca Knight, President | Alaska Rainforest Defenders | Alaska

"The Nature Conservancy is now one of the largest private landowners in the southwest Virginia coalfields, holding nearly a quarter million acres for private investors — land that surrounds some of central Appalachia's most economically-distressed communities. TNC has made it clear that resource extraction — including logging, gas drilling, and coal mining — will occur on this land. But more than two years have passed since its purchase, and no detailed management plans have been made available for public review. It is time for TNC to model responsible land ethics and environmental justice principles. TNC must meaningfully involve communities and residents who will be impacted by their resource extraction in the decision-making processes for their properties."

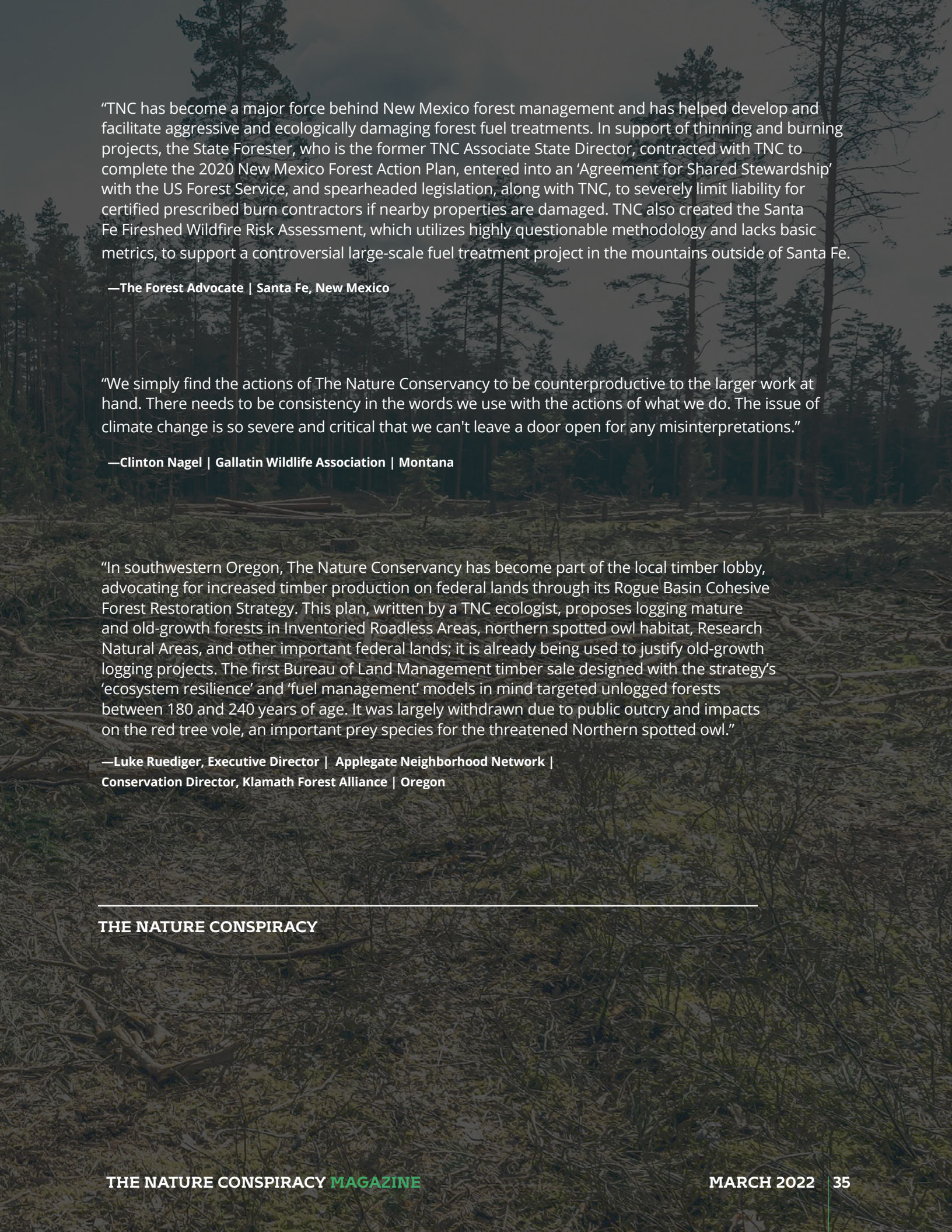
—Sharon Fisher, President | The Clinch Coalition | Virginia

"The Nature Conservancy was one of the groups the Coalition for Wetlands and Forests asked to support our efforts to save our 18-acre freshwater wetland, with 1,800 trees that sequester carbon and absorb some of the pollutants we are subject to in this environmental justice community. TNC did not support us. Workers started cutting the trees on July 4. By Aug. 31, 80% of the trees were cut and the soil was compacted. On Sept. 1, our community was flooded — in some areas, pretty seriously. This is exactly what we told the politicians, developers and environmental groups would happen."

—Gabriella Velardi-Ward, Co-founder | Coalition for Wetlands and Forests | New York

"In Montana, The Nature Conservancy and local ranchers have been supporting Bureau of Land Management projects that remove conifers — mainly juniper trees — on public lands. TNC claims this improves habitat for sage grouse, big game, and other species that rely on juniper/sagebrush habitat. But the best available science and on-the-ground evidence from similar projects show that it does just the opposite."

—Mike Garrity | Alliance for the Wild Rockies | Montana



"TNC has become a major force behind New Mexico forest management and has helped develop and facilitate aggressive and ecologically damaging forest fuel treatments. In support of thinning and burning projects, the State Forester, who is the former TNC Associate State Director, contracted with TNC to complete the 2020 New Mexico Forest Action Plan, entered into an 'Agreement for Shared Stewardship' with the US Forest Service, and spearheaded legislation, along with TNC, to severely limit liability for certified prescribed burn contractors if nearby properties are damaged. TNC also created the Santa Fe Fireshed Wildfire Risk Assessment, which utilizes highly questionable methodology and lacks basic metrics, to support a controversial large-scale fuel treatment project in the mountains outside of Santa Fe.

—The Forest Advocate | Santa Fe, New Mexico

"We simply find the actions of The Nature Conservancy to be counterproductive to the larger work at hand. There needs to be consistency in the words we use with the actions of what we do. The issue of climate change is so severe and critical that we can't leave a door open for any misinterpretations."

—Clinton Nagel | Gallatin Wildlife Association | Montana

"In southwestern Oregon, The Nature Conservancy has become part of the local timber lobby, advocating for increased timber production on federal lands through its Rogue Basin Cohesive Forest Restoration Strategy. This plan, written by a TNC ecologist, proposes logging mature and old-growth forests in Inventoried Roadless Areas, northern spotted owl habitat, Research Natural Areas, and other important federal lands; it is already being used to justify old-growth logging projects. The first Bureau of Land Management timber sale designed with the strategy's 'ecosystem resilience' and 'fuel management' models in mind targeted unlogged forests between 180 and 240 years of age. It was largely withdrawn due to public outcry and impacts on the red tree vole, an important prey species for the threatened Northern spotted owl."

—Luke Ruediger, Executive Director | Applegate Neighborhood Network |
Conservation Director, Klamath Forest Alliance | Oregon

THE NATURE CONSPIRACY

